

Action Plan to Increase Local Food Production and Farmer Income in Yancey County, North Carolina

A Report by the Yancey County Foodshed Project



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Project Partners

Community Foundation of Western North Carolina
TRACTOR Food and Farms
Yancey County Cooperative Extension
Yancey County Economic Development Commission
Yancey County Board of Commissioners

Online Report

A digital copy of the report is available at www.bit.ly/yanceyfoodshed.



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I: Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose of the Yancey County Foodshed Project is to help farmers, government agencies, funders, and other community stakeholders to: (1) Understand local food and farming assets, opportunities, and challenges, (2) Identify projects to capitalize on opportunities and address challenges, and (3) Create an action plan to implement these projects and strengthen the local food economy in Yancey County.

Activities

This project conducted the following activities between January, 2016 and December, 2016:

- Hosted monthly meetings with the Yancey County Agricultural Taskforce. This group included traditional and organic farmers, county government, and economic development officials.
- Facilitated five Farmer Listening Sessions in Newdale, West Yancey, Burnsville Town Center (two sessions), and at the Mountain Heritage High School's Future Farmers of America Program.
- Mapped and analyzed Yancey county's local food system through a value chain analysis process.
- Visited promising regional models to understand best practices and lessons learned related to replicable projects at Working Landscapes, Grow Food Carolina, Agribusiness Henderson County, and Seal the Season.

Action Plan

The report provides the following information:

- An overview of the assets, opportunities, and challenges identified for local food production
- Locally-generated ideas from farmers and community stakeholders on projects to increase farm acreage, grow farmer income, increase food production, and strengthen the local food economy
- Projects and policy recommendations for local food and farming initiatives
- Funding opportunities for advancing food and farming as an economic driver in Yancey County

Findings

Our findings reflect ideas generated from conversations with nearly 120 farmers and youth in Yancey County. Overall, these findings suggest a focus on projects that strengthen the entire local food system, with a specific emphasis on the infrastructure, production, and marketing and branding components of this system.

Project recommendations include:

- Approve the creation of Voluntary Agriculture Districts
- Hire a Yancey County Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator to implement and manage collaborative efforts and partnerships across the food system
- Expand TRACTOR's staff and put a strategic plan in place so that it can impact more of WNC's foodshed and partner with other food hubs across Central Appalachia and the Southeast
- Support red meat infrastructure, including the installation of cattle scales and coordination of collaborative marketing and hauling efforts, as well as a collaborative, multi-county effort around red meat processing
- Explore partnerships to produce convenience packages of vegetables and fruits, through existing regional processing infrastructure



Definition of a Local Food System

A network of businesses, nonprofit organizations, and collaborating players who work together to satisfy market demand for specific products or services.

See Appendix B on page 24 for a map of Yancey County's Local Food System

II: Yancey County: Assets, Opportunities, Challenges



Yancey County has many strong assets related to its people, land, and culture. The county is rich in farmland and has a unique geography that offers a competitive advantage to provide crops not grown by others. It is also home to a diverse group of large and small-scale farmers, including both traditional and organic vegetable farmers, livestock farmers, and next generation farmers. Food and farming is an important part of the county's historic and cultural heritage – with farming dating back several generations in family lineages.

Today, broad support for local food exists across diverse community partners, including the school system, community college, nonprofits, government agencies, and regional philanthropy, all of whom are committed to expanding the impact of agriculture on the local economy.

Food and farming assets consist of a robust direct sales marketing infrastructure for local farmers, including the downtown farmer's market, grocery stores, and restaurants (both locally and in neighboring communities, such as Asheville, NC.) Major investments in new infrastructure, like TRACTOR, a GAP-certified community aggregation and distribution center, as well as, excellent broadband infrastructure offer new market opportunities for local farmers to sell their produce on a larger-scale. Mayland Community College has one of the top agricultural programs of any community college in the nation, and the Future Farmers of America (FFA) program at the county's Mountain Heritage High School has been growing in leaps and bounds. In addition, 25 acres of prime farmland was purchased at Bowditch Bottoms for a program to support those without land to farm, thus encouraging new farming careers.

Challenges, identified by the community's farmers and food system stakeholders include: the transition from tobacco farming to vegetable farming, resulting in a loss of part-time income; rocky and mountainous terrain which keeps farms small; lack of affordable land to own and rent; difficulty in accessing capital for small-scale farmers; need for more business planning tools and business training for farmers; labor shortages; an aging farmer population; a need for mentorships between existing farmers and aspiring young farmers; a lack of value added processing infrastructure for vegetables and livestock; no local food sales to institutional markets, such as hospitals, schools, and prisons; and a need for a coordinated marketing and branding plan for locally grown products.

Nationwide, there is a growing demand for local food from consumers, restaurants, and institutions. There is also more investment in local food economies and infrastructure by funders and government agencies. USDA Results reports, "Industry estimates show U.S. local food sales totaled at least \$12 billion in 2014, up from \$5 billion in 2008, and experts anticipate that value to hit \$20 billion by 2019. The numbers also show that these opportunities are helping to drive job growth in agriculture, increase entrepreneurship in rural communities, and expand food access and choice." Organic local food in particular has seen dramatic growth in demand, with corresponding increases in the price that farmers can receive for their products. The skyrocketing demand for local food presents a critical opportunity to capitalize on local assets and develop strategies to capture this demand and grow local food's share of overall food sales in Yancey County, Western North Carolina, and the broader Appalachian region.

The purpose of this action plan is to offer a set of recommendations for local food and farming initiatives that capitalize on the county's assets and address the challenges listed above, while increasing farm acreage, growing farmer income, and developing a robust local food infrastructure and economy.

III: Farmer and Youth Listening Sessions: Key Findings

Overview

This project used a participatory research method to engage and collect ideas from nearly 120 farmers and youth in Yancey County. The purpose of these meetings was to pull out the experience and knowledge of existing and next generation farmers to better understand (1) what is and what is not working to grow a local food economy, and (2) new ideas to increase farmers' income, expand farm acreage, and capture more market opportunities locally and regionally.

1.1 Farmer Listening Sessions

We hosted four listening sessions with over 70 farmers in West Yancey, Newdale, and Burnsville Town Center. The below data summarizes responses from farmers related to what is working well, what is getting in the way, and what the opportunities are for local food and farm production in Yancey County.



Overall, farmers listed strengths related to the county's history and knowledge of farming, diversity of products, unique climate and geography, increase in demand for local food, supportive local markets, and strong local and county government partnerships. Barriers related to collaboration between small-scale farmers, labor shortages, financial and business planning support, access to diverse markets, red meat and vegetable processing facilities, and food and farming education in the community. See data below.

Question 1: What is working well in Yancey County?

Production

- Strong history and knowledge of farming in the community
- Farm products are of high quality, diverse, and fairly priced
- Techniques that utilize high tunnels, cold storage, compost, and plastic mulch irrigation
- Support and training for young farmers

Land, Climate, and Geography

- Access to lease, own, and rent land for farmers
- Unique landscape and natural resources
- Diverse geography results in a competitive advantage to provide crops not grown by others

Marketing and Branding

- High demand for local food – both organic and conventional
- Supportive local markets, including: Farmers Market, roadside stands, TRACTOR, Community Supported Agriculture Programs (CSA's), local restaurants, Ingles Grocery, and markets in Asheville

Infrastructure

- TRACTOR as supportive infrastructure, with access to cold storage, shared equipment, GAP education, coordination of market opportunities, marketing assistance, and Bowditch land access

Strong Partnerships

- Strong leadership from the community, county commissioners, cooperative extension, economic development officials, TRACTOR, Mayland Community College, and nonprofits
- Sharing of equipment, expertise, and information between farmers

Question 2: What is getting in the way of farmers making more money and growing their operations?

Production

- Support for small-scale farmers in the county
- A small number of dairy farmers
- Offer more business and educational trainings for farmers
- Sharing knowledge between farmers
- Support for women farmers
- Better planning, management, and communication from TRACTOR

Regulations and Certifications

- Policies, regulations and certifications related to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Food Safety Regulations, tax exemptions for small farms (Present Use Value laws are designed for large farms), and competition with government subsidies

Production Cost and Access Barriers

- Lack of time and financial resources
- Access to processing equipment for seconds
- Affordable land
- Access to capital (low interest loans)
- Access to large animal veterinarians
- Affordable crop insurance
- Damage to crops from wildlife, insects, and diseases
- Distance to buy farm supplies (e.g. fuel costs, lack of farmer owned co-ops for farm supplies, convenience of location to buy products)



Processing for livestock

- Distance to processing facility
- Scales to weigh animals
- Processing for chickens and rabbits

Shortage of labor

- Aging farmers creates a shortage of labor
- Mentors for new and young farmers for vegetable and livestock production
- Partnerships between diverse farmers
- Affordable housing for labor

Access to Diverse Markets

- Lack of access to diverse markets, including small, medium, and large-scale markets
- Pricing expectations are too low – no guaranteed prices for products
- Distance to sell crops to markets
- Lack of consistent demand

Marketing and Branding

- Need a coordinated marketing plan for locally grown products

Question 3: What are the opportunities for farmers to make more money and grow their operations?

Partner and Work Together

- Provide more farmer-to-farmer trainings
- Create mentorships between diverse farmers
- Develop partnerships between organic and conventional farmers
- Increase the sharing of knowledge between farmers, including growing practices, price points, varieties, and profits
- Develop cooperative labor pools
- Facilitate connections between farmers and landowners

Support Diverse Farmers

- Engage more diverse farmers, including women, Latinx, and African-American communities
- Invest in the next generation of farmers by supporting more programs for youth

Offer Financial Planning, Businesses Development, and Educational Programs for Farmers

- Offer targeted financial and business planning support for farmers
- Increase services that offer guidance and tools for farmers on production plans for specific crops

Increase Access to Markets

- Increase sales to more local and regional restaurants and institutions (schools, hospitals, prison)

Develop Marketing and Branding Strategies

- Start a “swap shop” online or on radio for veggie and meat sales
- Revitalize “Yancey Grown”
- Draft new materials to let people know who farms, and where they farm

Educate the Community on Local Food Options

- Lift up the value of local food in the community
- Offer more nutritional education and cooking classes
- Expand resources for FFA/4H/4H Livestock clubs
- Buy seconds from farmers through fundraising efforts and donate to the food insecure
- Donate unsold produce to those in need

Strengthen Infrastructure

- Expand TRACTOR, attract new growers, and increase support related to staff, planning, management, and communication
- Explore value added processing for vegetables, including packaging, freezing and equipment
- Research processing for livestock, including a local facility, scales to weigh animals, and processing for chickens and rabbits
- Establish a local “one stop shop” to purchase plastic, fertilizer, seeds, string, fencing, chemicals
- Enhance the Yancey County Farmers Market by adding a permanent structure



In 2017, the market will celebrate its 25th anniversary of supporting farmers and bringing local food to the community.

The market is a critical part of the county's food and farming assets and offers many opportunities to highlight local farmers, distribute fresh produce to the community, and celebrate the county's local food culture and heritage.

Economic Impact: Between 75,000 to 100,000 in sales in 2016

1.2. Youth as Next Generation Farmers Listening Session



We engaged 48 students through the Mountain Heritage High School's Future Farmers of America (FFA) Program to gain their ideas for potential projects. The below data summarizes responses from youth related to **what is working well and what is getting in the way** of local food production in Yancey County.

Overall, youth shared strengths related to the abundance of land, quality products, innovative growing techniques, and TRACTOR infrastructure. Barriers included support for youth and agricultural education, consumer education, and environmental concerns, like droughts. They also shared creative ideas related to using social media campaigns to better promote farmers and local food, offering more agricultural education in schools, advocating for local foods in schools, and establishing mentorships between youth and farmers.

Question 1: What is **working well** in Yancey County?

Production

- Good growers, hard workers, strong work ethic
- Grow quality products
- Innovative growing techniques, like crop rotation, irrigation practices, and cover crops
- Youth involvement with harvesting and planting of crops
- Support from Extension services to help farmers
- TRACTOR helps move products to market

Geographic

- Climate is good for growing produce
- Good nutritious soil and fertile land
- Low pollution
- Plenty of rain (usually)
- Access to land

Question 2: What is **getting in the way** of farmers making more money and growing their operations?

Production

- Lack of financial resources
- Limited number of farmers
- Need access to and resources for heavier equipment
- Need more resources allocated to youth and agricultural education

Geographic and Environmental Concerns

- Habitat loss
- Limited flat land to grow on, resulting in small-scale farms
- Need to prioritize existing resources (grow hay on prime farmland)
- Major regional drought in summer + fall 2016 – will there be more?
- Loss of bees/pollinators
- Wildlife eating crops

Demand

- Not enough demand for locally grown food
- Lack of consumer education and fear of GMO's

1.3 Big Ideas from Farmers and Youth

The below table outlines popular big ideas shared by farmers and youth.

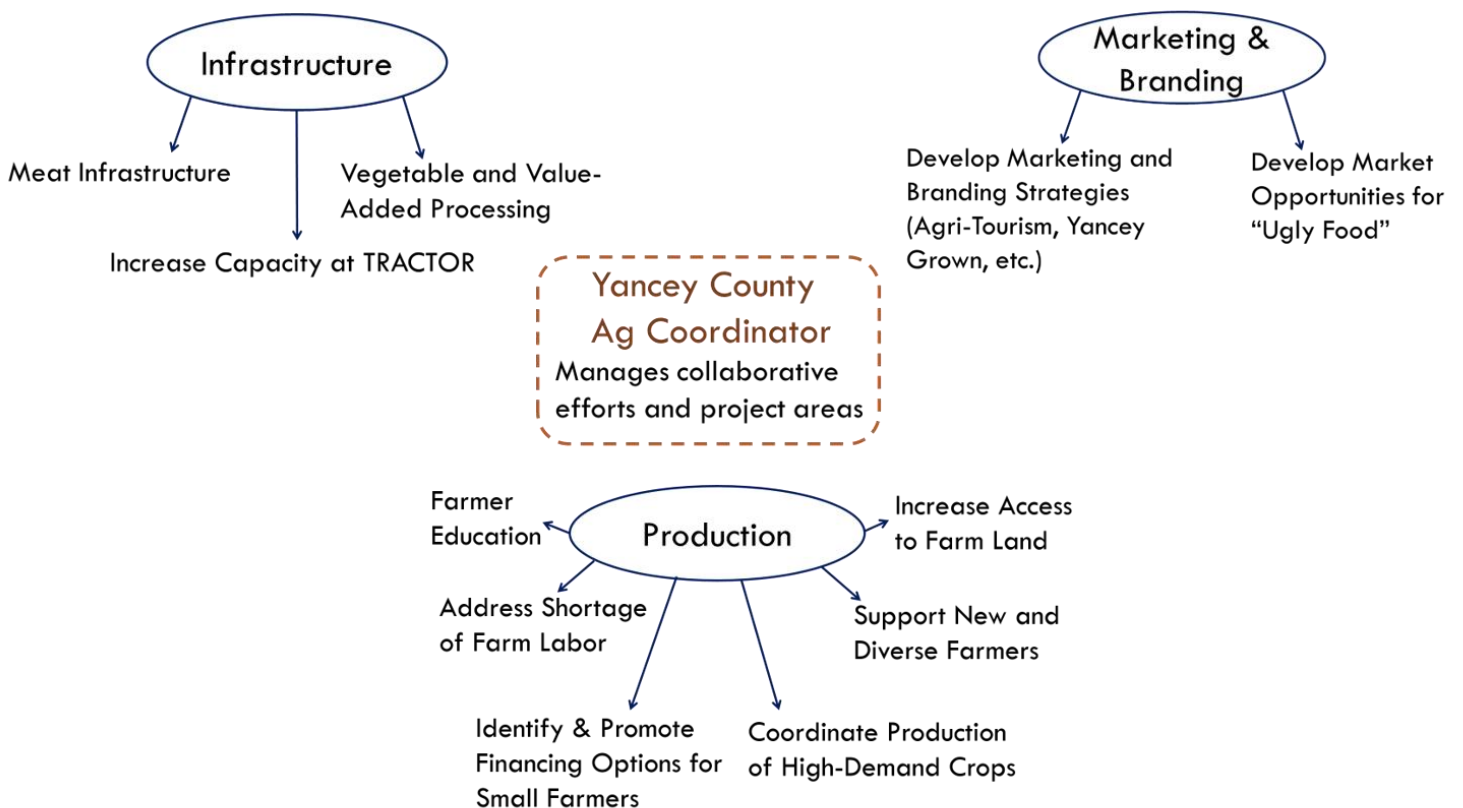
Popular “Big Ideas”	
1.	Local meat weighing equipment and processing facilities
2.	Processing equipment for fresh fruits and vegetables
3.	Invest in a cooperatively owned produce stand, store, and/or farmers market
4.	Expand services at TRACTOR, including a CSA Program
5.	Develop Agritourism in Yancey County
6.	Capitalize on existing demand for local food
7.	Brand and market local products under a collective label
8.	Engage youth in marketing and branding campaigns for local food
9.	Offer shared use equipment, bulk buying, and farmer education trainings
10.	Engage more diverse farmers, including youth, women, and Latino and African-American Communities
11.	Address labor shortages and start a shared labor pool
12.	Invest in shared cooling facilities
13.	Donate food/at-cost buying
14.	Publish a local food cookbook
15.	Begin cider and wine production from local fruit
16.	Investigate vertical farming & terracing opportunities

IV: Themes and Project Ideas

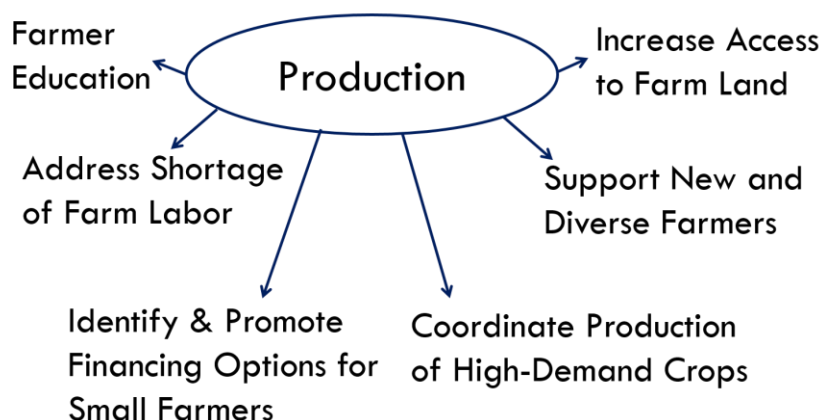
After the Farmer and Youth Listening Sessions, the Task Force and consultant team reviewed and organized the ideas that emerged into three top themes, and worked to synthesize and further develop the ideas generated into a short list of top projects.

The diagram below summarizes the top themes and project ideas generated from the farmer and youth listening sessions. These findings identified projects that strengthen the (1) production, (2) marketing and branding, (3) infrastructure, and (4) coordination of the local food system. Ultimately, these projects reflect the needs shared by farmers, build upon one another, and add up to a greater impact than any one focus area could achieve alone.

Section V of this report, “Project Recommendations,” on pages 13-19, lists the five highest priority projects that emerged from this process of condensing and prioritizing, and from further community interviews and engagement. This additional engagement included a Farmer Stakeholder meeting and a Community and Political Stakeholders meeting which brought together farmers and food system supporters from across the County, and across the region, to review and provide feedback on the project recommendations.



THEME 1 - Production



Provide Education for Farmers

- Create a schedule of learning activities related to planning, growing, marketing, and selling.
- Share season extension tools and practices, including engagement with programs like Smoky Mountain High Tunnel Initiative.
- Teach business planning and record keeping skills to farmers.
- Share examples of how to scale up small farms without large equipment, and implement practices like using black plastic and value added production.

Support New and Diverse Farmers

- Support new farmers, female farmers, youth, Latino and African-American farmers. Coordinate efforts among Extension, 4-H, Organic Growers School, ASAP, NC A&T, Mayland Community College, and FFA.
- Develop mentorship opportunities between new and older farmers.
- Brand Yancey County as a center for farm learning, skill development, and education. Offer training workshops and summer symposiums for interns, young farmers, and farm laborers that include affordable housing options and offer the opportunity to learn about the area and work on farms.

Increase Access to Land

- Request to establish Voluntary Agricultural Districts in the County.
- Coordinate a yearly program around how to lease farmland with WNC Land Link: work with realtors/lawyers/Mtn. Air to raise awareness about land leases.
- Research requirements for Present Use Value and decide if these policies need a revision to fit the needs of mountain farms.
- Research other ways to reward farmers for not selling their land to developers and help them keep their farmland in production.

Coordinate Production of High Demand Crops

- Coordinate farmers to grow high-demand organic and conventional niche crops (heirloom farming).
- Establish better practices for shared-use equipment, and once those are in place, expand the program, so that we can have machines available to lower farmer cost and labor requirements, and help small farmers at places like Bowditch.
- Research crops to diversify production and replace tobacco, with a preference for sustainable crops.

Identify and Promote Financing Options and Incentives for Small Farmers

- Research financing options and small business education services for local farmers: MAY Coalition, Self Help Credit Union, Mountain BizWorks, NC Rural Center, Natural Capital Investment Fund, USDA-RD, USDA-FSA, Carolina Farm Credit, etc.
- Set up a program similar to the French Broad Electric Co-Op REDLG program to be eligible for a USDA low-interest revolving loan fund.
- Identify funding for key projects from local resources like the Yancey Fund, Mountain Aire Residents Community Fund, crowd funding, and community financing.
- Research models of high wealth individuals pooling funds to support small scale farmers.

Address Labor Shortages

- Establish Food Corps Volunteers and AmeriCorps program in Yancey (an AmeriCorps program exists in Burnsville – how can we better utilize it?).
- Set up a shared labor pool that farmers can use to help with big projects on their farms.
- Coordinate efforts of organizations like Extension, Dig In, Farmers Market.
- Establish unconventional partnerships (e.g. expand existing inmate project and engage veterans to work on farms).

THEME 2 – Marketing & Branding



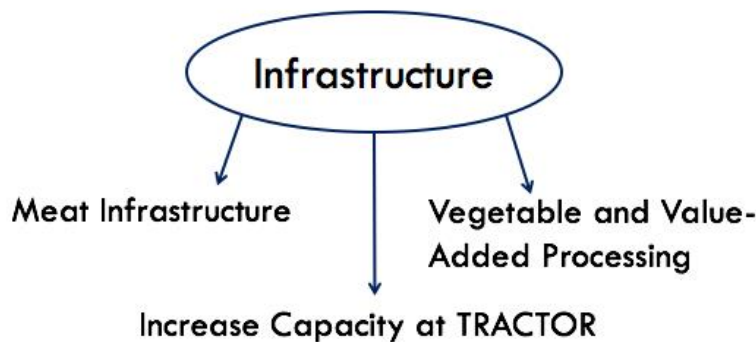
Develop Marketing and Branding Strategies

- Engage youth in marketing and branding of local food, including social media campaigns.
- Develop Agritourism in Yancey County: Establish a county fair board, organize tours to farms, and create partnerships between the agriculture, art, and tourism sectors.
- Brand locally grown products, (for example, Reboot Yancey Grown, use Mount Mitchell as a logo, and establish a Know Your Farmer campaign).
- Publish a local food cookbook to help buyers understand how to use more local foods.

Develop Market Opportunities for “Ugly Food”

- Find ways to market and utilize less-than-perfect/“ugly” food (i.e. cosmetic seconds/blemishes).
- Research market opportunities through Food Matters and Ingles.
- Research models like Perfectly Imperfect.

THEME 3 - Infrastructure



Meat Infrastructure

- Identify local small-scale infrastructure needs and coordinate regional partnerships for large projects.
 - Identify better ways to transport animals to processing facilities, such as aggregating cattle loads like they do at Mountain Cattle Alliance.
 - Visit cattle scale facility in Rutherfordton and consider purchasing a certified cattle scale to increase farmer profits in Yancey County.
 - Purchase mobile processing and/or slaughter equipment.
 - Review research by ASAP on demand, and feasibility study by Smithson Mills on costs and requirements, of a red meat processing facility in WNC.
- Establish a collective brand with shared raising practices, consistency, and clear quality standards. (Similar to Foothills Family Farms).

Increase TRACTOR Capacity

- Increase the staff capacity of TRACTOR via a director, warehouse assistant, driver and interns from colleges and high schools.
- Expand space for TRACTOR - purchase or build a new facility.
- Establish a CSA that is marketed and sells through TRACTOR.

Explore Vegetable and Value Added Processing Options

- Research the feasibility of selling seconds from TRACTOR and other growers. Models to visit include: Blue Ridge Food Ventures co-packing, Seal the Seasons Individual Quick Freeze processing in Hillsboro, NC and Working Landscapes chop and shred facility in Warrenton, NC.
- Research feasibility of building a packaged “convenience” vegetables and fruits processing plant.

THEME 4 – Yancey County Agricultural Coordinator



Hire a Local Food Coordinator To:

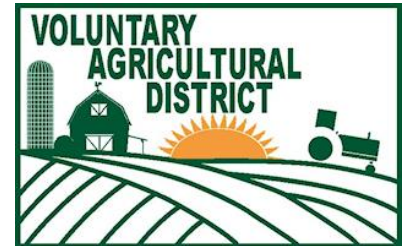
- Create and manage shared resource programs to support farmers through educational programs, cost savings, capital access, and the development of a shared labor pool.
- Build and strengthen relationships among people, businesses, and organizations throughout the County's local food system.
- Develop and leverage relationships with leaders and decision makers from food hubs, buyers, and other food system coordinators both within and outside of the region.
- Be a storyteller and marketer for Yancey County Agriculture, and for farming/local food entrepreneurship as an economic driver and career opportunity.
- Lead agricultural economic development efforts for the county, including agribusiness recruitment, demand assessment, policy analysis, and the communication of buyer expectations to farmers to ensure that Yancey County farmers are able to maximize their market share.

V: Project Recommendations

The following are the highest-priority projects that arose from the county-wide farmer meetings and the local food system mapping and analysis carried out by the Yancey County Agricultural Taskforce.

1: Approve the Creation of Voluntary Agricultural Districts

One of the simplest and most effective actions that can be taken to support agriculture in Yancey County is for the County Commission to adopt an ordinance establishing Voluntary Agricultural Districts. Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) are a voluntary designation for farms and farming areas that help encourage the preservation of historic farmland, decrease both present and future conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors, avoid costly nuisance suits, promote farmland conservation, reduce erosion, and potentially enable farmers to receive funding for farmland preservation.



RECOMMENDATION: Implement VAD Ordinance

Step 1: Review NC Statute, "[The Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Enabling Act](#)", which authorizes and sets out the requirements for the creation of Voluntary Agricultural Districts.

Step 2: County staff, with assistance from Task Force and Extension, draft proposed VAD ordinance.

- a. [Lincoln County's ordinance](#) seems to be a good model except for their farm inclusion requirements, which do not fit Yancey County's mountainous geography. This ordinance has particularly detailed language about notifications for buyers of property within the VAD area. [Avery County's ordinance](#) is also a good model, with farm inclusion requirements that are up to date with current NC statutes. [Brandon King](#), Extension Associate, Agricultural and Resource Economics at NCSU in Raleigh, is available as an advisor.

Step 3: Yancey County Commission Adopts Voluntary Agricultural District ordinance

Step 4: Creation of Yancey County Agricultural Advisory Board, as required by statute; this is an opportunity to formalize and continue the work of the Yancey County Agriculture Taskforce.

- a. Boards are appointed by the County, and commonly made up of at least seven (7) members, including members representative of each part of the County's farm community. Mark Williams, Agricultural Economic Developer for Henderson County, advised that the Board also include community members with legal, financial, and/or policy-making expertise.

Step 5: Follow up work by Advisory Board and County staff to get systems in place for implementation of ordinance. Systems in support of VAD ordinances often include:

- a. Digital and paper brochures describing the reasons for, requirements for, and benefits of VADs, such as those used by [Yadkin County](#), [Caldwell County](#), and [Forsyth County](#)
- b. "Plain English" policy guidelines for landowners and citizens describing the VAD process and benefits, and any fees (i.e. filing fees). Refer to Forsyth County's example [Policy Summary here](#).
- c. Application form for participation in VAD program, outlining requirements and benefits of program, and collecting information and certifications required for the Advisory Board to make an informed decision on each applicant's property.
- d. Addition of Voluntary Agricultural District layer to County GIS maps, including ½ mile notification zone around Districts. Printed maps showing district boundaries should also be prominently displayed in County tax offices, Register of Deeds, Extension offices, etc.
- e. Creation of VAD road signage – many counties seem to have these signs sponsored by their Farm Bureau as well as Carolina Farm Credit.

MODELS

Brandon King, Extension Associate, Agricultural and Resource Economics at NCSU in Raleigh, is a specific expert in this field of work. brandon_king@ncsu.edu

Jerry Moody, the Extension Director for Avery County, has offered to help walk Yancey County through the implementation and operational lessons learned in Avery County. jerry_moody@ncsu.edu

2: Hire an Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator

Many of the opportunities and big ideas that have traction from both farmers and key community members require at least some measure of third-party coordination to carry out. From production scheduling to group buying, to education, to infrastructure development, and capital access to marketing, the Coordinator is the linchpin for ensuring that countywide agricultural economic development initiatives succeed.

RECOMMENDATION: Build Upon Existing Research and Models from Other NC Counties

The position recommendations listed below are taken largely from the models offered by Polk and Henderson Counties. Each role emerged from detailed discussions with farmers, community stakeholders, and the Taskforce related to the key recommendations that a Coordinator could plan and implement.

Core Roles of the Coordinator

Production Support and Shared Resource Management

- Coordinate buying and distribution of bulk agricultural supplies
- Develop and manage shared labor pool program(s)
- Coordinate shared infrastructure and equipment programs; explore local rental agency partnership
- Organize peer-to-peer and expert trainings for farmers and agribusiness entrepreneurs, including possible development of Cattlemen's Association and similar organizations for knowledge sharing
- Identify low interest financing options for farmers and agribusiness entrepreneurs
- Establish a capital pool for farmers (via May Coalition or similar)
- Manage and grow pool of local foods volunteers, including Americorps and similar programs

Relationship Building

- Coordinate and promote networking events and targeted conversations to ensure that people, businesses, and organizations from all aspects of the local food system are working together by uncovering opportunities for coordination and collaboration
- Build relationships with and between farmers and buyers, including institutional food buyers
- Develop connections with other regional food systems, both for marketing and information sharing
- Coordinate monthly farm breakfasts in the wintertime to support relationship building among farmers and share resources, tools, and best practices

Storytelling and Marketing for Yancey County Agriculture

- Be a spokesperson for Yancey County agriculture, helping to convey quality, history, craft and dedication of farmers and products
- Partner with the Agricultural Advisory Board to promote and ensure the preservation and responsible management of key farmland tracts in Yancey County
- Work closely with local and regional media and marketing organizations to tell farm stories, highlight exceptional farmers, and connect regional consumers to the people who grow their food

Lead Agricultural Economic Development Efforts for the County

- Work with the County EDC Director to make farming and local foods a driver of economic development and job creation for the County, including recruitment of agricultural businesses to the county, and promotion of agritourism as a component of other County tourism initiatives
- Ensure the successful continuation and further development of the Yancey County Farmers Market
- Conduct market research to quantify local and regional demand for Yancey-grown agricultural products, as well as Yancey County farmers' ability to supply it
- Partner with Extension and TRACTOR to communicate buyer expectations, pricing information, and quality standards to farmers to ensure that ample supply is available to meet market demand
- Manage programs and coordinate collaborative fundraising efforts with other agricultural agencies and programs in the County that result in shared funding for major projects and goals.

Organizational Home and Compensation

House at Yancey County Economic Development Commission (EDC)

We recommend the Yancey County Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator be housed at the EDC. As an economic development organization working with businesses, organizations, and citizens across the county, state and country, their mission are a perfect fit for this position. In this role, they are expected to capitalize on the county's strong farm and food heritage to recruit and grow agricultural businesses and develop marketing materials and pitches. This person is a department head, and should report directly to the EDC's Board of Directors, the Yancey County Agricultural Advisory Board, and the County's Economic Development Commission Director. To achieve all of the objectives above, and make the position sustainable both financially and workload-wise, they will need to be an effective fundraiser and grant writer, and likely need to hire additional staff for the department.

Salary Recommendation

Based upon the salary ranges for Henderson, Orange, and Polk Counties published as part of the detailed report put together for the Henderson County Commission ("[Considerations for Developing an Agri-Business Economic Development Position within Henderson County](#)"), as well as Yancey County's current department head pay structure, a salary range of \$37,500 - \$62,500 is recommended. In addition to salary and benefits, travel, meeting, and hosting expenses, as well as conference attendance, will be integral parts of this person's work and must be fully funded for them to effectively carry out their work. Funding for this position will likely come from a mixture of County funding, private donations, grants, and other funds such as farmland preservation grants from state and Federal sources.

MODELS

Henderson County report – [Considerations for Developing an Agribusiness Economic Development Function within Henderson County](#) – describes the duties of all of the State's current Agricultural Economic Developers, and specific salary, responsibility, reporting, and qualification elements of positions.

Agribusiness Henderson County: Mark Williams, Executive Director - mwilliams@hendersoncountync.org

Polk County Agricultural Economic Development: Director, Dawn Jordan - djordan@polknc.org

Orange County Farms: Mike Ortosky, Agricultural Economic Developer - mortosky@orangecountync.gov



3: Invest in the Expansion of TRACTOR Food and Farms

TRACTOR Food and Farms is a 5-year-old food hub based in Burnsville, which aggregates and distributes local produce in order to increase farm income, preserve farm culture, expand access to fresh produce, and support a local food economy. Founded in 2011, TRACTOR has steadily increased its sales, expanded grower and buyer relationships, built trust locally and statewide, and added infrastructure to scale up its operations. Today, there are clear opportunities for leveraging these infrastructure investments to help TRACTOR reach its full impact and capacity.



RECOMMENDATION: Strategic Plan, Staffing Increases, and Regional Collaborations

Develop a Four-Year Strategic Plan, Including a Detailed Business Plan and Financial Model

TRACTOR is in need of a detailed strategic and business plan mapping out its next four years of growth and development, including: a review and update of its financial models and break-even analysis; an analysis of its current realities, strengths, and weaknesses; and a clear roadmap for how to achieve its goals, including a staffing plan, supply chain analysis, and market development recommendations including potential distribution partnerships. This strategic plan is beyond the scope of the Food Shed project, but needs to be completed in 2017.

Expand TRACTOR's Staff, Prioritizing Sales, Warehouse/Inventory Management, and Marketing Staff

Other food hubs have been amazed at the amount of work that TRACTOR has done, and the successes it has achieved, given its limited staff. And in those discussions, it has become clear that one of the biggest and most telling capacity gaps separating TRACTOR from other successful food hubs in the region is adequate staff.

The first area of need is sales staff. Successful food hubs are constantly finding ways to reach buyers and ensure that their product availability lists are on their minds. A full-time salesperson who is passionate about local foods and has some prior knowledge of the wholesale produce industry could dramatically increase TRACTOR's volume and sales numbers, and free up TRACTOR's director to focus on the many other elements of the organization that need attention.

The next area of need identified is administrative assistance, to help with things such as bookkeeping, logistics, and food safety compliance. In addition, a warehouse and inventory manager is needed to organize shipments, coordinate with sales staff to move products, minimize waste, and ensure that quality of delivered products is high (and feedback is given if issues crop up). This is a full-time job, and an essential one for a successful warehousing and distribution operation.

There are several other important roles to be filled, which should be prioritized through the strategic planning process. A farmer recruitment and production planning staff member is needed to increase supply and work with farmers in Yancey County and surrounding counties such as Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Madison, McDowell, and Mitchell counties. A marketing staff member is also needed to help promote and develop the CSA program being developed for employees at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital in Spruce Pine.

Regional Collaborations to Strengthen Appalachia's Local Food Economy

In discussions with a number of food hubs within a half-day's drive of TRACTOR, it seems clear that regional coordination and partnerships are needed to ensure that infrastructure is effectively placed, duplication avoided, and the overall supply of and demand for Appalachian grown foods is expanded. These regional collaborations create better efficiencies and coordination across the entire food system and help to capture significant grant opportunities that accelerate the scale and impact of everyone's work.

TRACTOR should build relationships and explore partnerships, with other regional food distribution organizations such as [Appalachian Harvest](#), [New Appalachia](#), and [Grow Food Carolina](#), to find opportunities related to distribution channels, seasonality, and backhauling, as well as, shared and strategic marketing and lobbying to increase Appalachia's share of the overall East Coast food supply chain. They might also partner on regional cold chain infrastructure, and farmer education related to food safety requirements, buyer standards, and traceability.

MODEL

Grow Food Carolina

The Task Force's site visit to Grow Food Carolina, in Charleston, SC, showed that rapid growth requires significant investments in staff to help market and move local food products. They have nine staff – a General Manager, an Operations Manager, three Salespeople, a Farm Coordinator, a Warehouse + Inventory Management staffer, and two drivers/warehouse staff. Original projections estimated 6 staff by this point, but with many high-touch clients to handle (chefs and grocery store produce buyers are notoriously picky), and a constant need for farmer recruitment and training as well as logistical support for their statewide supply chain, an expanded staff has clearly been necessary to fuel Grow Food's growth.



Grow Food Carolina is now close to break-even on its operational expenses with gross sales of \$2M/year. A 20% cut of produce sales, along with \$50,000 in rent received from professional offices in the front of their building, gives the organization itself an annual income of approximately \$450,000/year. This income will only cover the cost of operations; their budget requires grants or gifts to cover the cost of fixed assets and capital improvements. Grow Food's strong organizational partnership with its parent organization, the Coastal Conservation League, has also been critical for back-office support, shared fundraising efforts, and generating increased impact on land preservation by helping farmers to keep their land profitable.



Members of the Yancey County Agricultural Task Force visit Grow Food Carolina

4: Red Meat Infrastructure: Cattle Scales and Collaborations

A large portion of the WNC's agricultural enterprises are cattle farms, many of them "cow/calf operations" that keep a herd of mother cows, and then raise and sell the calves which those cows produce. Operations like these, most of which are [small, part-time businesses owning ~10-50 cows](#), are the under-appreciated backbone of the US beef industry. They are a key source of both supplemental income for farm families, and a key to keeping local land, especially hilly or otherwise un-tillable land, in agricultural production (and taxed under Present Use Value). Below are strategies to support these operations and make them profitable.

RECOMMENDATION: Small Equipment Investments, Big Social Capital Investments

Install Certified Local Cattle Scales

One opportunity is to install certified local cattle scales, to weigh animals before they are sold to buyers or brought to auction. These local scales are part of a low-cost, grassroots package of cattle-farmer support that can, based upon conversations with Extension agents and farmers in Rutherford and Haywood Counties, help dramatically increase the prices that farmers get for their animals, and cost relatively little to install and operate. They have the most impact when they are combined with coordinating and aggregating cattle shipments, and providing cattle farmers with peer mentorship and examples of new animal husbandry techniques. Bringing cattle farmers to weigh and ship their animals together creates both cost-saving opportunities, and chances to learn from other farmers about ways to increase quality and yields, and therefore increase both overall income and profits.

Collaborate to Aggregate Shipments

For shipping, a regional farmer collaboration that stretches across the state border into Tennessee could have a major impact. There is a sizeable cattle market in Greeneville, TN that is a major regional hub for shipments of cattle to Western "feeder" operations. Many Yancey County growers haul their cattle for auction, but only a handful of their cow-calf operations are at a scale sufficient to send tractor-trailer loads of cattle to the auction by themselves, and thereby lower costs and improve margins. A county-wide collaboration, banding together to aggregate shipments of cattle and utilize more efficient transport equipment, is a significant opportunity that requires minor initial investment. This could be a perfect undertaking for the new Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator.

Create a Cattlemen's Association

If these ideas prove attractive to regional cow/calf operators, they might be the basis for developing a local Cattlemen's Association, similar to those currently operating in Rutherford County and in the Western counties. Cattlemen's Associations are a low-cost, grower-led, and widespread program, often run in partnership with the local Cooperative Extension office. Getting growers working together (often with clear goals around supporting young farmer development, as in the Rutherford County Cattlemen's Association's programs) can build the collaborative muscles needed to tackle larger projects.

Prove Demand and Collaborate Regionally on a Red Meat Processing Facility

Many farmers across WNC are asking for a red meat processing facility for the region to process cattle, pigs, sheep/lambs, and similar animals. An [existing study by Smithson Mills Inc.](#), completed in 2014 as part of the WNC AgriVentures Project, details the equipment, sales numbers, site considerations, and other business planning components needed for establishing and running a successful, self-supporting red meat plant. Facilities of this type benefit greatly from economies of scale, and need an entire region's worth of demand to operate profitably. Many other counties in WNC are looking at and in need of such a plant, and the time is ripe for a multi-county collaboration to site, fund, and build such a plant. Models also exist, such as the [Alleghany Meats processing plant](#) in Monterey, VA, for community funding of such a project. We recommend that Yancey County build its red meat farmer base through the above-mentioned strategies, and then partner with a regional network of counties to ensure a red meat plant is built soon.

MODELS

Rutherford County
Cattlemen's Association: [Jeff Bradley](#), Extension Director.
jeff_bradley@ncsu.edu

Haywood County Cattlemen's
Association: [Leslie Smathers](#), Soil
and Water Conservation District.
lsmathers@haywoodnc.net

5: Vegetable and Fruit Processing

With many consumers strapped for time, and institutions even more so, there is potential to develop a local fruit and/or vegetable “convenience” brand, offering fresh or frozen products that have been peeled, chopped, and made easy for consumers, and especially institutional buyers, to utilize. On the seller side, processing produce has the potential to add value to local crops and increase their marketability, spread out income across the slow season of the year, and offer an attractive local option to both convenience-conscious retail consumers and time-sensitive institutional buyers.

To better understand the marketplace for these products, what it takes to produce them, and the business model for processing, as well as, the potential for TRACTOR to become a regional hub and brand for these convenient produce products, the Task Force reviewed national research on the viability of these markets, and also visited two vegetable processing facilities in Central NC.



RECOMMENDATION: Further Develop Partnership Opportunities, Don't Process In-House

National Research

Two national studies were recommended to the Task Force during the Grow Food Carolina site visit, investigating the feasibility of getting fresh and frozen processed produce into institutional supply chains. The first study, “[Overcoming Obstacles to Local Frozen Produce](#)”, tracks the efforts of Common Market, a Philadelphia-based food hub, to bring on a locally-sourced frozen foods line for their institutional clients. This study clearly recommended that food hubs not attempt to take on this highly capital and labor-intensive, high-volume, low-margin line of business in-house.

The second study, “[Beyond Beauty - The Opportunities and Challenges of Cosmetically Imperfect Produce; Report No. 3: Fresh-cut Processing and Foodservice Distribution](#)” is specifically focused on the opportunities and challenges surrounding coordinating farmers and food processors to more fully utilize cosmetically-imperfect produce and reduce food system waste. This study found that getting consistent volumes of cosmetic seconds (that still meet food-safety standards) is difficult, and a focus on this market can cannibalize sales of #1 quality, higher-margin product. As with frozen produce, fresh-cut and prepared produce for institutional and foodservice buyers requires heavy regulation, competition, and slim margins.

Site Visits to Vegetable Processing Facilities

The first facility, [Working Landscapes](#), is based in Warren County and chops and bags fresh produce for use in regional school districts through its Chopped Produce Initiative. They are currently selling to 16 school districts in NC, and are in need of some of the agricultural products which Yancey County is best at growing. Furthermore, cost savings on packaging (ability to use bulk bins instead of boxes, for example), may be able to offset or even entirely make up for the costs of shipping produce 4.5 hours to be processed. Task Force members left encouraged about the potential for partnership with Working Landscapes, both as a buyer and as a co-packer.

The second facility, [Seal the Seasons](#), is based in Orange County and focuses on buying, prepping, and freezing local produce in season, then selling it year-round to a distribution network of over 600 retail and institutional markets. They also expressed interest in some of the produce that Yancey County is best at growing and can potentially cross-dock at one of TRACTOR's existing drop-off locations to minimize additional costs borne for shipping. Task Force members see this as another opportunity for collaboration.

Big Picture

The above produce processing facilities represent significant partnership opportunities for TRACTOR, and by extension, our regional farmers and their products. To capitalize on these partnerships, more staff time be needed for the transportation and logistical elements of these potential relationships (further highlighting the importance of increasing TRACTOR's staff), and more GAP-certified farmers are still needed in TRACTOR's supply chain to meet institutional-scale demand.

MODELS

- [Working Landscapes](#) – Fresh produce chop/bag facility for institutional products. Warren County, NC
- [Seal the Seasons](#)– Frozen produce processor & brand, sells to institutions and retailers. Orange County, NC

VI: Additional Recommendations

Yancey County has tremendous opportunities to increase farm acreage, grow farmers' net income, and strengthen the local food system both locally and region-wide. The county's recent investment in expanding TRACTOR shows dedication to capturing opportunities for making agriculture an economic driver in the county. The new facility will make the projects recommended in this action report more feasible and impactful. With impact and feasibility in mind, we offer the following final recommendations.

1. Leverage Regional and National Knowledge Sharing and Support Networks

Local food is a sector where leaders are unusually open to sharing their best thinking and strategies to help the field grow. Organizations like the [National Good Food Network](#) and Federal agencies like [USDA-Rural Development](#) and the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) are leading the creation of a remarkable knowledge base around food systems development and food hub operations. Yancey County agricultural leaders should continue attending and presenting at trainings and conferences in this field, especially ones like the bi-annual National Food Hub Conference in 2018, and to both research and contribute to the growing body of knowledge contained in reports like those listed in the "Resources" section in Appendix C. Yancey County is doing some nation-leading work in agriculture right now, and publications and presentations can help to grow the county's prestige and attract leading-edge partners and agricultural businesses.

2. Capitalize on Unique Geography Through Trade, While Preserving Identity

In our discussions with Sara Clow, General Manager at Grow Food Carolina, she noted that each of our regions have unique capacities and products that make trade important. Apples do not grow in Charleston, and rice is tough to grow in Burnsville. As the network of regional food hubs and food systems continues to grow, one of the major opportunities for growth lies in trading regional goods that retain their sense of place. When apples and cabbage from WNC meet salt and rice from Charleston, and their stories and origins are preserved and celebrated, the new food culture of the South rises.

3. Collaborate on Infrastructure Development

It's important to coordinate at a larger regional level with other food hubs, like [Appalachian Harvest](#) in Duffield, VA, to more efficiently utilize processing equipment, collaborate on shipping and distribution, and access larger market opportunities. Yancey County must look beyond its borders when making infrastructural decisions, whether those be around red meat processing, vegetable processing, or even the expansion of TRACTOR. This will open up new markets, increase overall capacity, and bring business and funding opportunities that could not be attracted by any single organization or locality.

4. Build the Local Labor Pool, and Partner on Labor Policy Issues

Farmers across WNC and the country, are struggling to find the labor they need. Five strategies specific to Yancey County have emerged during this project to address this gap.

- Create a shared labor pool – a cohort of trained, hard-working local people who work across different farms throughout the growing and harvest season. The Coordinator can potentially help to organize this labor pool, working with Cooperative Extension, FFA, and [Mayland Community College](#) to identify trainee farmers.
- Market the area as an educational center, where aspiring farmers can attend classes at Mayland Community College and with educational providers like [Organic Growers School](#), secure apprenticeships and mentorships, get hands-on experience, and develop a strong peer cohort.
- Create a partnership between Cooperative Extension and nearby prison systems to engage low-risk prisoners in farming as part of their preparation for re-entry into society. This would be part of a program designed around reintegration, job skills, and reducing recidivism. A pilot program run by Adam McCurry at Cooperative Extension with inmates at the county jail has seen tremendous success already, and has good potential for expansion and replication, both with prisoners and with at-risk, adjudicated youth.
- Support veterans through farm training and work programs. Similar programs have emerged across the nation [to help veterans address PTSD](#).
- Engage in policy discussions related to immigration reform, an important labor issue for the agricultural sector. Partner with other agricultural counties such as Henderson County on a policy-advocacy agenda.

5. Work with Legislators on Present Use Value and Farm Tax Exemptions

The first is a change to [Present Use Value](#) legislation, to better fit the realities of mountain farms by making the minimum required size for qualifying as a horticultural farm to 3 acres (instead of 5 acres). This will lower tax burdens on small farmers, and help keep family farms in business and farmland preserved. The second legislative issue brought up is the increase in the [Farm Tax Exemption](#) requirement, made in 2014, to a minimum of \$10,000 in farming income (up from \$1,000 previously) in order to qualify for sales tax exemptions. This increased floor has hurt many small mountain farmers who use farming as a source of supplemental income for their families.

6. Promote Agritourism as Part of Larger Regional Tourism Trails and Packages

Tourists who come to WNC do so in large part because they love mountain landscapes, including the sights, sounds, and even the smells of working farms. With experience tourism on the rise worldwide, people are even willing to pay to work on a farm, for example, paying money to thresh rice in South Carolina fields. Tying agritourism into the region's vibrant arts, music, and heritage tourism economy, and partnering with groups such as the [Toe River Arts Council](#) on shared promotion, is a major opportunity.

7. Maintain the Momentum of the Yancey County Agricultural Task Force

Over the course of this project, members of the Task Force strengthened their relationships, analyzed challenges, and developed community driven strategies to strengthen the local food economy. We recommend this work continue under the auspices of the Agricultural Advisory Board, required by Voluntary Agricultural District legislation.

8. Create a 501(c)3 and a Permanent Home for the Yancey County Farmers Market

The Farmers Market is critical for bringing income to farmers, and to the surrounding merchants in downtown Burnsville, where the market is held. A key next step for the market highlighted by many stakeholders is finding it a permanent home. A multipurpose pavilion for the market itself as well as other events is one model that many towns and counties around the country have implemented, and which might be a good fit if a suitable location is identified. In order to secure this permanent home, and capitalize on it through enhanced programming such as [SNAP/EBT Double Bucks](#), it would be important for the Farmers Market to be a 501(c)3 or have a solid Fiscal Sponsorship agreement in place. Assistance for 501(c)3 formation is available through entities such as [Community Law & Business Clinic of the Wake Forest School of Law](#).

9. Increase Support for New and Diverse Farmers

Mayland Community College and the Mountain Heritage High School Future Farmers of America Program are doing tremendous work to teach young farmers, and their full classrooms attest to young people's interest in farming. We should capitalize on that interest and bring together this wave of young farmers with current farmers through mentorship programs, to ensure that the knowledge and wisdom of older farmers is passed on.

With that in mind, a quick glance around that FFA classroom will tell you that women are going to be a major part of the next generation of Yancey County's farmers, perhaps even the majority. As such, farmer support and mentorship efforts must reflect this new diversity, and develop programs that better support female farmers, and promote them into leadership positions within the farming community. There are a number of highly-successful and iconic farms in WNC being run by women right now. An opportunity exists to engage those strong female leaders as mentors for Yancey County's rising class of female farmers.

This commitment to diversity also extends to support for Latino and African-American community members to be included and engaged in Yancey County's agricultural programs and services that promote land ownership, support farm businesses, and link farmers to opportunities. [Resourceful Communities' New Economy Fund](#) and [USDA's Office for Advocacy and Outreach](#) are resources for developing programs that create environmental, economic, and social justice benefits for socially disadvantaged farmers across race, Hispanic/Latino origin, and gender.



VII. Closing Summary

Yancey County has a number of excellent project opportunities to capitalize on in the coming years. In addition to the priority projects listed, there are a number of additional paths to explore and important projects to tackle within both the Big Ideas listed at the end of Section III, and the Project Ideas listed in Section IV. In terms of tackling these opportunities, the County is already on the right path, with its investment in the new TRACTOR facility opening up numerous doors to increased aggregation and processing capacity, providing space for shared-use equipment and bulk supplies, and offering a space for agriculture to truly grow as an economic driver for the County.

Capturing these opportunities, especially through the work of an Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator and an expanded TRACTOR, will dramatically change the landscape of farming and food systems both in Yancey County, and in WNC as a whole. TRACTOR's expansion will benefit farmers in all of the surrounding counties and bring local foods to plates across the region and beyond. Furthermore, a successful Agricultural Economic Development Coordinator model will inspire other communities to find their own coordination and development opportunities. In these ways and more, Yancey County has the chance to build upon its reputation as a visionary leader for mountain agriculture.

There will certainly be challenges to overcome on the way. The county's mountainous terrain alone will continue to dictate that Yancey County farmers must grow at a smaller scale than the larger industrial farmers in America's flatlands and deltas. As such, specialization, and taking advantage of the mountains unique climate, will be key to finding and capturing profitable niche markets appropriate for smaller mountain farms. No crop has yet arisen to replace tobacco as a source of reliable part-time farm income; some crops have the potential to provide this kind of income and opportunity for small farmers, but none has proven capable yet. Therefore, it's important to support part-time farmers and increase the profitability of the crops and animals that they raise on their farm, through cost saving coordinated efforts and effective collaborative marketing.

With arable land so rare and precious to begin with, preserving prime farmlands and keeping them in agriculture becomes even more important. Ensuring that farming is profitable is the best way to do this, as The Coastal Conservancy determined when they built and funded Grow Food Carolina. In addition, farmers must have access to the capital, equipment, supplies, and labor needed to grow; a major part of the Coordinator's job will be to ensure that all of these resources are available, at a reasonable cost, to the County's farmers and ranchers. And, to make sure that these resources are used effectively, farmer-led and expert-led trainings will be needed.

With a strong, well-educated, and well-resourced farmer base in place, TRACTOR, Economic Development, and the Coordinator should have the products they need to enter new markets, recruit talent and bring new agribusinesses into the County. With a strong history of farming, rich soils, a unique climate that can grow cool-weather crops well into the summer, and 21st-century assets like blazing fast broadband internet and a highly connected food system support infrastructure, the County is well-poised to capitalize on its opportunities, address these challenges head-on, and be a national model for Appalachian agriculture.

Appendix A: Farmer Listening Sessions: Methodology

Methodology

(1) Adult Farmers and Youth as Next Generation Farmers Listening Session

At each of the farmer listening session, participants divided into small groups of up to six people and answered key questions on poster size worksheets. Next, the facilitators pulled out patterns in each group's responses and presented the themes back to the group for reflection and discussion.

Key Questions

- What is already working for farmers in Yancey County?
- What opportunities do you see to help farmers scale up and make more money?
- What is getting in the way of farmers making more money and growing their operations?
- What are some big projects that could really increase income and acreage for our farming community?

(2) Farmer Follow Up Meeting

At the farmer follow up meeting, we shared our findings from all three listening sessions and offered space for reflection to ensure our research was headed in the region direction.

Key Questions

- What ideas or projects are missing?
- What is the first project you would do?
- What positive impact would this project have for farmers in Yancey County?
- What people, organizations, or programs should we be working with on this?

Appendix C: Resources

Dawn Thilmany McFadden, David Conner, Steven Deller, David Hughes, Ken Meter, Alfonso Morales, Todd Schmit, David Swenson, Allie Bauman, Megan Phillips Goldenberg, Rebecca Hill, Becca B.R. Jablonski, and Debra Tropp. "The Economics of Local Food Systems: A Toolkit to Guide Community Discussions, Assessments, and Choices," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Marketing Service, March 1016. Web.

[https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Toolkit Designed FINAL 3-22-16.pdf](https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Toolkit%20Designed%20FINAL%203-22-16.pdf)

J. Hardy, M. Hamm, R. Pirog, J. Fisk, J. Farbman, M. Fischer. "Findings of the 2015 National Food Hub Study," Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems and Wallace Center Winrock International, April 2016. Web. [http://foodsystms.msu.edu/resources/report/2015 National Food Hub Survey Findings.pdf](http://foodsystms.msu.edu/resources/report/2015%20National%20Food%20Hub%20Survey%20Findings.pdf)

Jim Barham, and Fidel Delgado. "Building a Food Hub from the Ground Up: A Facility Design Case Study of Tuscarora Organic Growers, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service," February 2015. Web. <https://apps.ams.usda.gov/MarketingPublicationSearch/Reports/stelprdc5110552.pdf>

JoAnne Berkenkamp. "Beyond Beauty - The Opportunities and Challenges of Cosmetically Imperfect Produce; Report No. 3: Fresh-cut Processing and Foodservice Distribution," Tomorrow's Table, April 2015. Web. [http://www.ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/Beyond Beauty - Distribution Report 3 FINAL 4-1-16.pdf](http://www.ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/Beyond%20Beauty%20-%20Distribution%20Report%203%20FINAL%204-1-16.pdf)

Molly Riordan, "Overcoming Obstacles to Local Frozen Produce: Matching Production Mode to Market Niche," Common Market. Web. [http://ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/knowledge/LocalFrozenProduce CommonMarket.pdf](http://ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/knowledge/LocalFrozenProduce%20CommonMarket.pdf)

Multimedia - Central Appalachian Network's Local Food Value Chain in Action: <http://www.cannetwork.org/>

Phil D'Adamo-Damery, Nikki D'Adamo-Damery, and Pete Ziegler. "A regional scan of available data on Food Security, Access, & Equity in West Virginia and the Appalachian regions of North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio," Appalachian Foodshed Project and Appalachia Funders Network, June 2016. Web. <http://www.cannetwork.org/documents/AFPRRegionalFoodSecurityDataScan-AppalachiaFundersNetwork-June2016.pdf>

R. M. Severson, and T.M. Schmit. "Building the Success of Food Hubs through the Cooperative Experience." Cornell University, Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management. Ithaca, NY. Extension Bulletin 15-04. April 2015. Web: <http://dyson.cornell.edu/outreach/extension-bulletins>

Thomas Watson, Noah Wilson, and Andrew Crosson. "The Local Meat Industry: Opportunities and Challenges in Central Appalachia," Convened by the Central Appalachian Network in partnership with: The Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation Swift Level Farms and The West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition and Rural Support Partners, June 2012. Web. <http://www.cannetwork.org/documents/TheLocalMeatIndustry-OpportunitiesandChallengesinCentralAppalachia.pdf>

Smithson Mills, "Developing Processing Capacity for Red Meat Producers in Western North Carolina," in partnership with WNC Agriventure, AdvantageWest, and Land of Sky Regional Council, October 2014. Web. <http://bit.ly/redmeatreport>

USDA, "Local Food Marketing Practices Survey," National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2015. This survey produces benchmark data about local food marketing practices. Findings from the survey showed the total value of local food to be \$8.7 billion nationally. Sales to institutions/intermediaries accounted for \$3.4 billion, direct consumer sales were \$3 billion, and sales to retailers were \$2.3 billion. Web. [https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online Resources/Local Food/index.php](https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Local_Food/index.php)

Appendix D: Funding Opportunities and Support Agencies

FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS

Appalachian Regional Commission

- Grant opportunities: Review the asset based development, entrepreneurship and business development programmatic areas. https://www.arc.gov/program_areas/index.asp.
- Contact: Olivia Collier, ARC Program Manager ocollier@nccommerce.com

USDA Programs

- Grant opportunities related to land conservation, production, aggregation/distribution, processing, marketing and consumers. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/ILLocalFoodChain-2015.pdf>
- Contact: Mel Ellis, State Director, mel.ellis@nc.usda.gov

USDA Rural Community Development Initiative Grants

- Grant opportunities for community economic development projects in rural areas. Review grants for the Rural Cooperative Development Program, Strategic Economic and Community Development Program, Farm Labor Housing Direct Loans and Grants, Economic Impact Initiative Grant. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/programs-services-communities-nonprofits>
- Contact: Randall A. Gore, State Director, (919) 873-2000

USDA: North Carolina Farm Service Agency

- Farm Loans. <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/North-Carolina/>
- Contact: Kim Rumfelt, County Executive Director, kim.rumfelt@nc.usda.gov and Bobby Etheridge, State Executive Director, bobby.etherridge@nc.usda.gov

COMMUNITY, PUBLIC, AND PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS

Community Foundation of Western North Carolina

- Food and Farming Focus Area. <http://www.cfwnc.org/FocusAreas/FoodandFarming.aspx>
- Contact: Tara Scholtz, scholtz@cfwnc.org

Golden Leaf Foundation

- Grants for agricultural projects, including: development of new crops, expanded markets for agriculture products, scientific research, training for farmers, cost-effective techniques and value-added agricultural enterprises. <http://www.goldenleaf.org>
- Contact: Dan Gerlach, dgerlach@goldenleaf.org

MAY Coalition

- Loan interest loans. <http://www.maycoalition.org>
- Contact: MAYloan@bellsouth.net

NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission

- Supports projects for the agricultural industry, impacting rural communities and stimulating economies. <http://tobaccotrustfund.org/>
- Contact: William Upchurch, Executive Director, 919.733.2160

Resourceful Communities: Creating New Economies Fund

- Small grant opportunities for food related projects with 'triple bottom-line' approaches that generate economic, environmental and social justice benefits. <http://www.conservationfund.org/what-we-do/resourceful-communities>
- Contact: Kathleen Marks, Associate Director, kmarks@conservationfund.org.

BANKS

Carolina Farm Credit

- Farm Loans. <https://www.carolinafarmcredit.com/home.aspx>
- Contact: Burnsville@carolinafarmcredit.com

Self-Help Credit Union

- Low interest loans and small business development support. <https://www.self-help.org/>
- Contact: Jane Hatley at jane.hatley@self-help.org

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (CDFI's)

Mountain BizWorks

- Support for business planning, coaching and financing. <https://www.mountainbizworks.org/>
- Contact: Patrick Fitzsimmons, Executive Director, fitzsimmons@mountainbizworks.org

Natural Capital Investment Fund

- Support for local food system development. <http://www.conservationfund.org/what-we-do/natural-capital-investment-fund>
- Contact: Marten Jenkins, President and CEO of the Natural Capital Investment Fund, mjenkins@conservationfund.org

NONPROFITS

Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Project (ASAP)

- Tools and support for farms and food related businesses. <http://asapconnections.org>
- Contact: Charlie Jackson, Executive Director, charlie@asapconnections.org

NC Cooperative Extension / WNC Ag-Options

- Provides resources for farmers to diversify and expand operations. <http://www.wncagoptions.org>
- Contact: Jennifer Ferre, Program Coordinator, admin@wncagoptions.org

NC Rural Center

- Support for leadership training, entrepreneurship, and business lending. <http://www.ncruralcenter.org/>
- Contact: Barry Ryan, Senior Director, barry@ncruralcenter.org

Organic Growers School

- Provides hands on organic workshops, trainings, and conferences for new and existing farmers. <http://organicgrowersschool.org>
- Contact: Nicole Delcogliano, Farmer Programs Coordinator, nicole@organicgrowersschool.org

Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI)

- Provides resources for farmers, farm advocates, food security advocates, and farmers markets. <http://rafiusa.org/>
- Contact: Scott Marlow, Executive Director, smarlow@rafiusa.org